Screaming in the Night by bentnotbroken1

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Summary: Everything Billy touches, breaks. Things go differently during the fight between Hargrove and Harrington, and suddenly there's another person pulled into the secret mess that is Hawkins Indiana. (Season 2 finale rewrite, season 3 AU)

1. Chapter 1

Billy slid into the drivers seat with ease, pulling a cigarette out of the pack and lighting it quickly. After *hours* of driving around this fucking hick town looking for his good for nothing sister, he'd finally gotten an answer. He inhaled deeply, letting the smoke fill his lungs until it burned, burned like his cheek, burned like the anger in his gut. Even flirting with Mrs Wheeler hadn't done anything to ease the simmering hatred he feels for Max at this moment.

He *hates* her. The little bitch always runs her mouth, has the *nerve* to be continuously late despite his father reiterating the importance of being *punctual,* and has now snuck off with her little nerd friends, and probably *Sinclair,* and Billy is fucking livid. Because he's told her and *told her* that there are consequences for this shit! But hey, she don't care. It's no skin of *her* back. *No* , it's *his* skin that sports the punishment for her actions. As if it's *Billy's* fault that Maxine doesn't listen. As if he is her fucking keeper.

He puts the Camaro in drive and speeds off towards the middle of bum fuck nowhere.

Maybe that's the whole point, he thinks. His father puts him in charge of her knowing full and well that she would fight him at every turn, not that he *needs* an excuse to berate him and put him in his place. Or maybe he wants Billy to be so busy *babysitting* and looking for his damn step sister that he won't have time to *embarrass* him.

He shivers. *The harsh, disgusted whisper of a word breathed in his ear, a rough thumb pressing into his throat, panic, pain.*

He slams that thought to the back of his mind. No. Not going there.

It's her fault that *that* happened the first time too. Couldn't keep her fucking mouth shut. He didn't know if she was just blind to his distress or fucking dumb, but either way she made the comment and he paid for it later, in the dark of the night when everyone else was asleep.

So, yeah, he's not really thrilled that she seems to keep fucking him

over. Like tonight? Why the fuck is she at some shack in the middle of the woods? With a bunch of good for nothing boys. It's like she is *trying* to piss him off. She's not even toeing the line now, she's gone and hopped a fucking foot *over* it, and Billy is about to lose his god damn mind. One more mistake this week and he'll be limping too much to enjoy any of the parties he's planning to attend.

He slams his hand on the steering wheel before turning dangerously fast onto the, what was their names? Byers'? road.

She's a damn *pest* and will be the death of him. He *hates* her. Hates that she still has fire behind her eyes when she calls him an asshole. Hates that she doesn't have to watch what she says, that she doesn't have to creep around the house afraid to even breathe. Hates that she can still stand up for herself. That she is still fucking *fearless* at times.

It also worries him. He was just like her once. And that...that didn't go so great for him. She has zero self preservation because she's never had to, and he *knows* that she will push too far one day and it *won't* be Billy that pays. As much as he hates her, he doesn't want *that*. Sure, she's held her own against *him* when he's threatened her and put a bruise or two on her arms, holding her wrist too tightly to get a fucking point across, but Niel Hargrove is a different kind of fucking monster.

Of course, Billy can take it. He's been taking it since his mother left seven years ago. But Max? There's no way. Her 'tough girl' attitude would crumble to the ground at her feet in the aftermath.

The house comes into view and he slams on his brakes, dirt flying in the air as he comes to a stop. He sits still for a moment as the door opens and a familiar figure comes out to greet him.

Oh, this night just *keeps* getting better.

Fucking Harrington .

Steve hears the car before he sees the headlights in the window. He watches the fear cross Max's face as she insists that her brother will kill her. Kill *them*.

And Steve just *knows.* He knows it's probably going to come to blows. There is no way around it. He is going to be pissed that Steve is here with his sister. It would give him all the ammo he needs to try to knock him into next Tuesday. They've had this...rivalry, if you'd even call it that, and Steve thinks it's time to put it to an end.

He steps onto the porch and tries to calm his racing heart. He's faced and killed *literal* god damn monsters. Hargrove doesn't scare him.

Ok, he *mostly* doesn't scare him. There has always been something unhinged and dangerous about the other boy, and Steve would be an idiot to underestimate him. But there wasn't time to plan. He could see the terror in the kids faces and he wasn't about to let anything happen to the little shits. They were his responsibility now.

The door slams and Steve watches the glow of Hargrove's cigarette light up his face. At first it doesn't look angry, it's more amused? What the hell?

"Am I dreaming," He says, blowing smoke into the air, "or is that you, Harrington?"

"Yeah it's me, don't cream your pants, " He replies and *why the fuck did he say that?*

Billy just sighs and asks him what he's doing here. Like *he's* the one intruding.

Fuck this guy.

Steve is just trying to get him to leave without it turning into a brawl. Is his step sister here? No, haven't seen her. Are you sure? She's a Redhead, bit of a bitch. And Steve bites back a snarl. Who the fuck calls their sister a bitch?

Then he insinuates that Steve is… what...*creeping* on his sister? On *Max*? What the fuck? Like he would ever do something like that. Come on man, just leave she's not here.

And then Billy's eyes flit over Steve's shoulder, the hand holding his cigarette coming up to point in the direction of the house. "Then who is that?"

His stomach drops. The kids have obviously done what he told them not to do, and gathered in the window.

"Oh, Shit."

The surprise shove knocks him to the ground. "I told you to plant your feet." He spits, kicking him in the stomach. It knocks the air out of him, and he struggles to get up as Billy barges into the house, slamming the door behind him.

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He can hear the kids yelling, can hear Billy's voice, low and threatening. Fuck. Steve clambers up the stairs and yanks the door open.

Hargrove's got Lucas in his clutches by the time he gets there. "You're so dead, Sinclair! "

And fuck that. How dare he put his hands on these kids!

"No, " Steve says, anger taking over, "You are! "

He hits Billy as hard as he can and keeps going. Ducking out of the way when he swings back. He thinks Billy is going to be pissed that he got a hit, but instead he whoops and hollers in excitement. He's been *waiting* to see this King Steve.

And Steve thinks if it hadn't been obvious *before* that there is something really wrong with the guy, it is *now* .

But he keeps fighting, he has kids to protect. He can worry about the implications of that shit later.

Billy laughs as he takes another blow. Like he doesn't even feel them. Like he's had worse. Steve wonders why that is and pauses just long enough for Billy to get the upperhand.

Steve never sees the plate coming.

Blood pours down his face as pain erupts across his head. He staggers backward, suddenly disoriented and barely registers himself falling to

the floor after Billy savagely headbutts him.

Oh, god. He's going to have fucking brain damage if this keeps up and yeah… he should probably worry about that because *shit* , the monsters aren't going to be the the ones to kill him tonight, Billy fucking Hargrove is.

He puts a hand to his forehead and feels the gash the plate has left. Fuck.

The kids are still yelling, Billy is still laughing and *Steve* , Steve is resigned. The blond is already straddling him, one hand fisted in Steve's shirt and the other pulling back to land another blow and he thinks this is it. "Just get it over with" He hisses, hoping maybe he will get this crazy anger out and he'll leave the kids alone. He goes limp in Billy grip, shuts his eyes tight and braces himself for the impact, but it doesn't come. He slowly opens his eyes to look up and is shocked to see confusion and then *horror* cross the bloodied face above him. Blue eyes search his and Steve really has no idea what the fuck is happening right now.

"Fuck! " Billy screams, letting go and rising suddenly, leaving him shaking on the floor. Everyone gives him a wide berth as he stalks into the kitchen. "Fuck!" He repeats, pulling at his hair, now tinged red from his bloody fingers. Max slowly moves to stand in between them, arms raised in surrender as she approaches, like her brother is a wild animal and well… that's pretty fucking accurate right now.

"Billy? It's ok.. Ok? I'll go."

Dustin and Mike drop to the floor next to Steve and they are asking him questions. *Is he alright? How many fingers? Steve are you with me? Come on, man. Talk to me! Steve!*

But he can't focus. His vision is blurring and his head feels like it's going to explode. He needs to stay awake, he knows he does. He doesn't know what Billy plans to do so he is still watching him pace in the kitchen, eyes flicking to Steve's prone form and back again, coming down from his rage fest. He bellows one last "Fuck! " And kicks the refrigerator.

Oh, no.

There's a collective gasp as the force of it rattles the door open and the body of the demodog tumbles out, landing on the angry boys boots. He stares down at the corpse for a second before whispering, "What the *fuck*?"

Steve doesn't hear what else he says as he turns to them, because darkness is quickly closing in on him and there's nothing he can do about it.

He just hopes the kids will be alright.

2. Chapter 2

Billy was pleasantly surprised. Steve Harrington could *actually fight.* The bastard could *also* take a hit like nobody's business. This was going to be fun. It had been awhile since he's had a real one on one fight with someone that could go toe to toe with him, and it feels… Well, it feels good.

All the tension, the anger, the *hatred* , finally has an outlet. Sure, he could have followed through and roughed up Sinclair a bit, but it wouldn't have helped. He would have held back, he's not his *dad,* ok. But going ham on Harrington? *That* he could do.

He looks different now than he did on the porch. There's a hard look in his eyes as he punches Billy, like he's been lit with a righteous fire. Like he's some sort of fucking *hero*. Hell, maybe he is. After all, *Billy* is the villain in Max's life, isn't he?

He's made King Steve show up to bat and if he'd known all it took was threatening this band of misfits, he would have done it long ago. *This* Steve, the one with eyes that say he'll end you, a busted lip and brusing knuckles, he's fucking beautiful.

It would have been a beautiful fight too, if he would have let it continue the way it was, but he's got to get Max back home. It's a damn shame that Billy has to fight dirty.

The haze of anger turned elation has fully settled in his chest and he can't stop the manic laughter that escapes his lips as Harrington stumbles back, broken ceramic skittering across the floor. God, it feels *good.* Show all these punks who is really in control here. They are screaming at him, fear laced in their voices and that just eggs him on. *Yes,* he thinks, *fear me*.

He isn't thinking anything, though, when he straddles the man on the floor. He just wants to hold onto this feeling. This *power.* He grabs Harrington's shirt and is about to go to town on his pretty little face when he sees the resignation in his eyes. "Just get it over with," he whispers, and then the fight just leaves him, his body going still. Harrington shuts his eyes, and it's like he's just... *giving up.* He *wants*

Billy to pummel him. Wants it to please. be. over.

Just get it over with.

The words ricochet through his mind like a bullet and Billy just… he just *can't.*

"Please," he'd silently begged, bile creeping up his throat as angry eyes and heavy hands gripped him, "get it over with. Just hit me already! Just do it and leave me alone to lick my wounds."

"Fuck! " He screams, and puts as much distance between them as he can. It's like...its like he was staring at himself. Harrington was in *his* place and Billy was... *No*!

His chest aches. He's not his dad. He's *not.* But… the way Harrington looked… "Fuck!" He *is* his dad. He's fucking Niel Hargrove, all anger and violence and he feels like he's going to throw up. He pulls at his hair because he doesn't know what else to do with his hands… his hands… that are split open… bloody…

He sees Max creeping closer to him, hands out and placating. *Shit.* That's right, there are witnesses to this shit show. "Billy, it's ok, " She says quietly, like she is afraid he's going to lash out and bite her. Can't really blame her, though. Moments earlier he would have.

He glances back to the mess he's made of Harrington's face. He just *had* to use a plate, didn't he? *Jesus Christ.*

He's not used to this, this *feeling* in his chest, the churning in his stomach. Like he fucked up for real. This wasn't just yelling at Max or hitting some dick that had the balls enough to fight with him. This was… this was different. He looks down at his busted knuckles. He'd let his anger…

Again he rages, "Fuck! " and lands a good hard kick to the refrigerator. At least *that* won't bleed out on the floor.

He hears a soft gasp as the door opens and something heavy flops out of it, landing with a disgusting splat.

He stares down at it and it takes a second for his mind to catch up to

what his eyes are seeing. There's a… *creature* .. laying at his feet. Faceless and ugly, with something still oozing out of it and spilling onto his boots "What the *fuck*?"

Chaos descends and he suddenly has four teenage brats pulling at him, at his clothes, his arms, and all of them talking at once.

It's not what you think. Billy, come on. Let's just go. It's a science experiment. Science! Nothing to see here, right?!

Their hands are still grabbing him, dragging him away from the blob of creature.

Don't touch me! He thinks. "*Hands off!"* They aren't listening, they keep talking and damn they are so loud! And they *suck* at lying. He wants them to just- "Shut up!" He yells again, twisting out of their hold and staring them down. "Everyone, *shut the fuck up*! "

They all take a step back and stare at him, barely making a sound as he takes a few ragged breaths and looks back down at the *thing* before glancing around the room. He hadn't been paying attention before, but there are some crazy ass drawings lining the walls, the furniture, the floor. He's breathing heavy now, but it's not from his fight with Harrington. Something is seriously *wrong* here.

He looks at his sister and snaps his fingers at her, "*You,*" He says, "Explain to me what the *fuck* is going on."

"Billy-" She starts, but he interrupts.

"*Now, Maxine."*

She takes a deep breath and crazy words he's never heard come spewing out of her mouth. She asks Lucas to explain some things she doesn't know. Something about an Upside Down. *What is upside down? Demo-what nows? Secret labs? Experiments.*

Monsters.

He holds up his hand to stop them. "Ok, that's enough." He *thinks* he understands but he's not sure. It sounds like something out of a horror film.

And where does *Harrington* fit into all this?

Speaking of Harrington, the King himself groans and Billy pushes past the group of kids to kneel on the floor. He's not dealing with this monster shit alone.

Again a flurry of motion overcomes him and he's staring into the face of a curly haired kid whose hands are holding tightly to his arm. "Don't you fucking touch him. " He snarls, and damn. Billy has to give the little shit props.

"I'm not going to *hurt* him, " He scoffs, "just need to wake his ass up so he can explain to me why he's carting around my sister and a bunch of rejects to go monster hunting."

Reluctantly the boy removes his hand, but he is still standing right next to him, refusing to back up. He ignores the kid and focuses on the task at hand.

"Hey, Pretty boy," He says to Harrington, gently moving his face from side to side. He tries not to stare too long at the bruise now forming on his eye. "Time to wake up. " The older boy groans again but doesn't do much else. "Shit. I think I gave him a concussion. "

"No, shit! " Curly says, "you don't fucking say? "

"Dustin! " Max warns, "shut up! "

"No! I won't shut up! Your stupid brother knocked Steve out! " He screams. "He could have killed him! "

That pain he felt earlier sinks deep into his chest. He's right. If Billy hadn't stopped-

The other kid, Wheeler-the-prude's brother, he thinks, pipes up from the threshold. "Guys! We don't have time for this! We need to go! "

"Go?" He asks, voice turning cold and hard. "You aren't going anywhere." He's not letting his fucking sister out of his sight. Not with… those *monsters* running around. He could let the other kids do what they want, he supposes, but damn, Harrington took an ass beating to protect them. He's not going to leave their deaths on his

conscious.

"Hate to break it to you," Wheeler kid replies, "but we weren't going to listen to *Steve* when he said we couldn't go. What makes you think we are going to listen to *you?"*

This kid has a fucking death wish.

He jumps up and kind of revels in the way they all scurry back a bit. "*Because,* Stevie boy here couldn't take me on. You really think *you* can get through me?"

They ponder that for a moment before the brat grabs a bat with all kinds of nails sticking out of it.

Billy backs down a bit. "Hey now, champ. Let's not get crazy, alright? "

"Max, " The boy calls, nodding over his shoulder, "Get the syringe. "

Billy feels his eyes widen in shock. "The what-?"

Max scrambles to grab something from a table and when she comes back to her friends side be can tell that it is indeed, a syringe. But of what?

He's weighing his options now. He could rush at her and take it from her easily, but there's no telling if the kid will *actually* hit him with the bat. And while it wouldn't be the first time he's taken a bat to the back, the last one didn't have fucking nails in it. "You don't have to do this, Max. " He tells her, hoping to get her to be reasonable.

Her face hardens. "I do, and I will if you don't let us go. We *need* to go."

"You really going to poke me with that thing? " He asks her. "Do you even know what's in it? Or how much to administer? It could kill me. Is that what you want? "

"It's a sedative, and I don't care. We have to go, and you're going to let us. "

Well, if he ever wondered if Max wanted him dead, he has his answer.

This is such bullshit.

Much like the man on the floor, all the fight leaves him. "Fine, " He crosses his arms in front of his chest. "But I'm going with you. "

A chorus of protests echo around him.

"That's the deal! " He screams, trying to get his point across. "You go, I go. End of discussion. "

Wheeler makes a face like he just ate a barrel of lemons. "Ugh, alright. Come then. I don't care, but we have to leave NOW. " Before Billy can ask where they are going, he disappears down the hallway.

Ok.

Curly, or Dustin he remembers Max calling him, drops beside Harrington. "We can't leave Steve! "

Sinclair huffs, "Look at him Dustin. He is no condition to fight. Let's leave him here. "

"So the demodogs can come snack on him while we're gone?! I don't think so."

Billy wants to bang his head into a wall. This is fucking *ridiculous.*

Wheeler reappears with a set of keys dangling from his hand.

"Mike? Are those Mrs Byers car keys? "

The little shit *rolls his eyes.* "How the hell did you think we were going to *get there? Walk? "*

He digs his palms into his eyes, trying *really* hard not to kill these annoying brats, before motioning for the kid to hand them over. He relents and Billy pockets the keys before bending over to scoop Harrington off the floor. He's actually heavier than he looks and he grunts with the exertion. "Open the fucking door. "

It's Max that complies and helps him shove the unconscious man into the back seat. Dustin comes out of the house with a first aid kit and an ice pack and it's *his turn* to roll his eyes. Besides cleaning the cut and bandaging his head, nothing in that box would help wake him up. Max and Sinclair disappear back into the house and he almost yells at them to get the hell back out here, but they soon reappear with more boxes of stuff and now he's really confused. "What is all this junk?" he asks, pulling out a pair of goggles before they are tossed into the trunk of the car.

"It's for our *monster hunting*," Wheeler sneers, shoving the menacing bat into a backpack. "How else are we going to defend ourselves?

Alright, Billy can get behind that. In fact, he has something he could work with too. He jogs over to the Camaro and pops the trunk, grabbing the heavy metal crowbar he keeps there...you know...just in case.

Wheeler makes a face as he returns with it resting on his shoulder. "What? You can't tell me we are going after those things and not expect me to have a weapon."

He ignores him and throws more stuff into the trunk. Billy lights a cigarette and inhales. What the fuck is he even doing here? Was he really going along with this crazy shit?Maybe they are all pulling one over on him. This shit can't be real, but then Max is dragging gasoline cans over and it's starting to feel like they are going to be blowing something up tonight.

"Are you little shits done packing yet?" He huffs in annoyance. His nerves are fried and he just wants to get this shit over with.

They all nod and he slides into the front seat while his sister jumps in the passenger side, the other two piling into the back with Dustin and sleeping beauty. He takes another drag of his cigarette and stares for a moment at the creepy house, where he knows a dead monster dog lies on the floor and a puddle of Steve Harrington's blood soaks into the carpet. He tries hard not to think about how that makes him feel.

Fuck this night.

"Ok, " He speaks finally, putting the car in reverse and chucking the still burning butt out the window. "Where to shit birds? "

3. Chapter 3

Steve regained his hearing first, though it was a bit hit or miss for a few moments.

"Here….no turn…"

His head fucking *hurts,* and his face.. *Oh, god.* What happened after he passed out?

"Shut...drive…"

Drive? What? Wait, where were they?

"...Billy!"

His eyes snap open. *Billy?!* "Wai-" he tries to speak but it feels like his mouth is full of cotton. Why is everything so blurry? Where *the fuck* were they?

It's Dustin who grabs his hand when he tries to touch his face. "No, no. Don't touch it."

"Wher-" he tries again as the fuzzy shapes turn into people, into the *kids* and things are zooming past them, and yeah this is what he was afraid of. They are in a moving car.

They hit a pothole and he nearly topples onto Mike.

"Hey, asshole!" Dustin hollers, kicking the seat in front of him, "Watch where you're going. Want to give him *another* concussion?"

Steve sits up slowly, feeling a pull on his hair. He gingerly brings his hand to where he knows the gash is. Apparently it's been bandaged, so at least he's not bleeding out anymore. He moves his attention to the front seat where Max is sitting with a map in her lap and Lucas holding a flashlight over head so she can see. He's almost too scared to look at the driver's seat, but when he does his heart nearly bangs out of his chest. "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!" This isn't happening. It's not. This is a dream. A really bad, head injury induced dream.

He hears the blond laugh. "Oh, good morning Princess. Good of you to finally join us."

Shit. It's not a dream. Billy fucking Hargrove is driving and the last thing he remembers about Hargrove is that the demodog had literally fallen on him. So, Steve has to ask, "What the hell is going on here?!" It's stupid, he knows what's going on, but he is still holding out hope that he's *wrong* . That they are driving toward *safety* and not some suicide mission in some creepy ass tunnels. "Please tell me we aren't going where I think we're going," his breath hitches and he starts to panic because this can *not* be happening right now, he's supposed to be keeping them *safe* and how can he do *that* if they are driving straight for danger? He tries to lean forward to, he doesn't really know, *try* grabbing hold of the steering wheel, but Dustin is pulling him back.

"Steve, whoa it's ok. You're fine buddy. We're fine."

"No! Dustin! No! We are in-" he pauses and looks around at the interior, "Jonathan's *moms* car, and the dick that made my face look like *this* " he points to his black eye and bloody nose for emphasis, "is behind the wheel, while fuck knows what is happening at the lab. We are the *furthest* thing away from fine!"

"Calm down, Pretty Boy, no need for hysterics."

Oh, that's it. "Fuck you, Hargrove! What, do you like *know* everything now? Do you *know* what they have planned? You should have fucked off. Why the hell are you even still *here* ?"

"I'm *here* , because some little bastard threatened me with a fucking baseball bat from hell and tried to get my sister to dose me with a sedative if I didn't let them leave. And I figured, hey, why not? They are going out to hunt creatures of the night so I might as well join them. *Could be fun* ." He says it with a shrug. Like it's not a big deal. Like he didn't just find out that monsters were real and that they are driving right for them.

"You're crazy," he mutters, half delirious with the ridiculousness of this situation. "You're *fucking* crazy! All of you!"

He needs to get out. *They need to leave* . They need to *stop* . "Pull over."

"No can do, amigo," he nods over to Max, "Little sis still has that pesky syringe."

And yeah, now that he's looking, he can see it in her hand, but he really doesn't care about that right now. He shouts, "Pull. Over!" at the same time Lucas tells him to "Turn here!"

The car jerks to the right as Hargrove makes the turn and hits the field, causing Steve to smack his head on the ceiling when they go over a few bumps.

"Whoa ho! This is what I'm *talking* about!" Hargove shouts and it's official, he is a total psychopath.

They skid to a stop when the headlights come across the hole Hopper made and it's barely in park before the kids start jumping out. Steve stumbles after them, groaning as the throbbing in his head intensifies. "No...no guys." he pleads as they unpack scarves, goggles, rope and gasoline? Jesus they are really going to go through with this. He needs to do something. "Hey, where are you going? Are you deaf? Hello!" he knocks on the roof, "We are *not* going down there!"

They continue to ignore him and he finally turns to face Hargrove. "A little help here, man?"

He just grins wolfishly and lights a cigarette.

"Wow, yeah, thanks for the help. It's not like you *owe* me or anything. You know, you *just* beat the ever loving shit out of me."

His smile falters at that. "Look, I'm *here* for *Max* ." He points to the ground, "And If *she's* going down in that creepy ass hole, *so am I* ."

"Great, that's great. You're going too. Am I the only sane one here?!" He starts grabbing things from Dustin's hands. "This isn't happening. We are NOT going down there, you hear me! We're *not* !"

Dustin grabs his shoulder. "Steve! Listen, I know you're upset, I get it. But a member of The Party needs assistance, and we are here to

provide that assistance." Steve wants to argue because now is really not the time, but Dustin is still talking, "I know you promised Nance that you'd keep us safe." He pulls out a backpack, the familiar bat sticking out of it and hands it to him expectantly, "So keep us safe."

Fuck. They had him right where they wanted him. There was no way he was going to let these kids go down there alone and with *Billy Hargrove* of all people.

He grabs the backpack and slings it over his shoulder. "Fine! But I'm in charge."

Dustin smiles brightly, "Sure!"

He glances back over at Hargrove who is swinging around a...crowbar? And thinks this is the most fucked up situation he's ever been in. He pulls on a scarf and a pair of goggles, being mindful of his injuries, and heads for the hole, where Mike is already throwing down rope.

"Don't you all look like a bunch of nerds." Billy says, patting Steve on the back. He does his best not to flinch at the contact, but it's pretty obvious, and the other boy steps away from him.

Dustin shoves a handkerchief in his hand. "You're gonna want to put it on, man. I'm serious. This shit is toxic."

Billy stares down at it and shrugs, "Yeah ok." He wraps it around his nose and mouth, "But i'm not wearing those fucking goggles."

Dustin sighs, "Sure whatever, let your vanity kill you. Let's go."

The kids are already in the hole when Steve jumps down, Billy right behind him. The first thing he realizes is that it is *cold* . Like colder than underground should be. And it's *dark* but he can still see the particles floating in the air all around him. "Holy shit." Nancy wasn't kidding when she'd described the terror and unearthly feeling she had when she'd been pulled into the Upside Down. This is messed up.

Billy must sense it too because he mutters, "What the fuck *is this* , Harrington?"

He knows this has to be unnerving for him, hell Steve is spooked as fuck, but he told him to stay back. It's not his fault that he didn't take his warning seriously. "Hey, you wanted to come."

His eyebrows bow down in a frown but Steve turns to the kids, flashlights beaming and bouncing off the walls of the tunnel and on each other's faces as they argue about which way to go.

"Just follow me." Mike says, taking the map and moving forward down one of the twisting tunnels.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Hey, hey. hey. I don't *think* so." Steve interjects, moving to stand in front of him. "Any of you little shits die down here, I'm getting the blame. Got it, dipshit? I'll lead the way."

"Ohh, finally taking charge, King Steve? I *like* it."

Max groans. " *Shut up, Billy* ."

" *You* shut up," he replies, roughly nudging her out of the way.

Steve is too tired for this. " *Everybody* , shut up." He studies the map and nods in the direction Mike was going. "Yep, it's this way. Come on."

They start trudging after him and for once they are quiet. He doesn't blame them, the tunnels feel suffocating and dread fills his stomach with every step he takes. He studies the map and directs them down another corridor, trying not to think about what else is down here with them. Down in this hole where they have nowhere to go. Where it would be easy to get *lost.*

He shudders.

No one is getting lost on his watch. No way. No how. Not happening. They've already lost too much to this Flayer thing. He won't let it win. Even if the air seems to get thicker the farther they go. Even if they can hear the far off cry of a demodog. Even if his hands are shaking when he reads the map. Fear is weird. He knows he's scared but yet his feet keep moving. He figures the kids are no different, except for maybe Mike. That kid has seemed way too high strung and determined to be *scared* .

It should probably make Steve feel like a total loser that he's more afraid than a *child* , but it doesn't. Sure, he's scared as hell, but he's still leading this little expedition despite that, so he feels like he's doing ok, all things considered. But he still can't shake the paranoia that he'll lose someone so he looks back every so often to make sure all the kids are there. Billy is near the back behind Max again and Steve can tell, even in the dark, that he is tense. He's tapping the crowbar on his leg as he walks, and his gait is almost… defensive. Dustin is bringing up the rear, lagging a foot or so behind him.

He moves forward calling back over his shoulder. "Keep up, Henderson!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm coming." He sounds put off about it and Steve wants to smack him upside his head. It's not a good time to be left behind. They could fucking *die*.

These little shits owe him so much for this.

4. Chapter 4

It was harder for Billy to slip back into his devil-may-care persona than he originally thought.

The pent of anger and rage, the need to *destroy* had all but disappeared, and now he was left feeling...well, strange. It had been easier when Harrington was passed out. He could compartmentalize then. He could handle the crazy shit his sister had said because at least this hell hole was a literal *hell hole* and not just a shitty town that existed solely to mock him. Monsters? Sure. He *knew* monsters. Driving a bunch of brats to an empty field? Why not? He'd done more outrageous things in the last *week*. But hearing the muffled and downright sore voice of Harrington waking up made his mask crack.

The nasty epiphany he'd had less than an hour ago was still settling in his gut like a bad case of food poisoning, and he didn't want to spend too much time dwelling on it. So he popped his neck, put the mask back in place and did what he was told, like the good little hostage he was.

Hostage. Yeah, that shit was funny. He wasn't *actually* worried about their threats anymore. He could ditch them on the side of the road if he wanted to, but this whole upside-down-monster thing was obviously dangerous. He wasn't going to leave Max and her friends to deal with it, even *if* these dog things could potentially kill him. The fact was that he was more afraid of his *dad* killing him if he came home without her again. Unlike death by hell beast, he'd probably make Billy suffer first.

He's a bystander to the pathetic attempt at talking the kids out of this adventure. He's got nothing to do with this. He's here for *Max*. He tells Harrington just as much before they're all dropping down into the darkness.

He doesn't know what he's expecting at first, maybe just your run of the mill damp hole, but what he finds when he jumps in after Harrington is beyond his imagination. It's *otherworldly* is what it is, and he's suddenly glad for the mask on his face. There's creepy looking ash in the air that doesn't fall, just fucking *floats,* and that

really isn't normal. It's also cold as fuck and he wishes he'd brought his damn jacket.

Oh, well. Can't do anything about it now. Not like it would have made much of a difference any way. This kind of cold seemed to seep right into your bones.

He still isn't entirely sure what is going on, beyond knowing they are going to set something on fire, but he can't turn back now. He's in it, whatever *it* is.

And he has say, he's impressed with Harrington taking charge. It's like tonight he's seeing the person everyone talks about him being. Not the pussy whipped, rundown, sad looking babysitter that he'd been interacting with. It was refreshing. He usually doesn't like being a follower, hates being told what to do, but in this case, he'd gladly step aside and let King Steve take the lead.

He falls back to almost bring up the rear of this little party so he can keep an eye on Max and Sinclair. There's just the one boy behind him as they stumble along the uneven ground. It's only because his ears have been trained to listen for footsteps that he notices the ones behind him disappear. He sighs in annoyance, spinning around and stalking back a few yards. Do these shitty brats *ever* do what they're told?

Sure enough, the Henderson kid is standing alone, staring up at something hanging from the ceiling. Like a fucking *moron.*

"Hey!" He calls, surprising the boy enough that he falls on his ass just as some kind of flower shoots more ashy stuff into the air.

Billy hauls the boy up by the back of his shirt, "Come on, Shirley Temple, keep up with the rest of the class."

"Shit! I'm sorry, ok? I got distracted. Let me go. "

"*Move then*," He shoves him forward and they quickly catch up with the others who had stopped when they'd heard Billy shout.

They reach the "hub" a few minutes later, but Billy stands back at the entrance of *th* eir tunnel. It would be too easy to get turned around in

this mess and these idiots are haphazardly sloshing gasoline everywhere, including their own clothes. He'd rather not accidentally set himself on fire, thank you very much.

Harrington ushers them all beside Billy when they're done and pulls out a zippo. "I'm in such deep shit," He mutters, lighting it and tossing the flame into the fuel.

The room is immediately ablaze and Billy grabs Max by the arm tugging her along. There's no telling how much time they have before this whole damn place is engulfed. They need to get out pronto.

Something is different as they run the way they came. *Fuck*, the walls were *moving* now, inky tentacle like vines whipping out and trying to get ahold of them. He was going to have fucking nightmares for *weeks* after this.

They're jumping over them, doing everything in their power to not get snared when Wheeler trips. *They don't have time for this.*

Harrington uses the Hell Bat to beat the monster vine off the kid because he's still in King Steve mode, all steely determination and action. It makes Billy think about the fire in his eyes when they'd fought and how much he'd really like to-

He doesn't get to finish the thought because another vine is wrapping itself around Max's calf now as she tries helping the kid up and Billy sort of loses it. It's not like he *cares, ok,* it's just that it's his responsibility to protect her. No freaky vine thing is going to drag her down and make her into its dinner. Not while he's here.

He reacts quickly, hacking away at it with the crowbar, laughter bubbling in his throat as black blood, *if it even was blood,* splatters across the handkerchief and his forehead. The rush it sends through him is amazing. He's never felt so fucking alive.

He pulls his sister up off the ground and they all start moving again until they aren't . There's a growl ahead and they almost crash into each other in a haste to stop.

The faceless creature is *there.* Its ugly head is opening up and there

are *thousands of razor sharp teeth* glistening in the beams of the flashlights.

All that compartmentalization shit from earlier? Yeah, it flies out the fucking window.

It's not like he wasn't *aware* that these monster things were down here. Hell, he'd seen the one back at the Byers house with his own two eyes, but this wasn't like that. It wasn't some abstract thing that Billy could tuck safely away in the recesses of his mind with all the other shit that *didn't happen.* There was no ignoring it or pretending it had all been a fucking joke, because *this* thing was alive and menancing, and walking right at them.

Henderson says something then, a name maybe, and the kids do that thing where they gasp at once and Billy should just get used to being out of the loop by now.

Apparently, this kid had thought it was *great idea* to have this monster dog as a fucking *pet*? *Jesus,* how were these kids still *alive*?

He's talking to it and pulls something out of his pocket.

"A *candy bar? "* He snorts, and gets shushed and side eyed, like he's the only one thinking this is crazy.

But somehow it fucking *works* . "Holy shit."

"Go, *go go go* ." Henderson waves them on and they're running desperately again to the exit. He's so glad he's physically fit. He doesn't know how these nerds are keeping up. Fear must be one hell of a motivator.

They can see a faint light in the distance. *Halle-fucking-lujah.* Freedom is within their reach, they just have to *keep moving.*

Billy reaches the rope first, but he doesn't climb. He spins around and screams, "Max!" before he drops the crowbar, squats down, and forms a foothold with his hands to give her an extra boost to get out of the hole.

Harrington is shoving the rest of them to the rope and they both help

them climb, shouting, *Faster! Faster! Come on! Hurry the fuck up!* As the roar of the fire and animalistic growls and cries get closer.

The kids are *finally* above ground and he motions to the other. "Sometime *today*, Pretty Boy!"

But he shakes his head. "Leader goes last."

Billy grabs his shirt for the third time that night and hisses, "Oh, my fucking God we don't have time for this!"

And they *don't, b*ecause the dog monsters are rounding the bend, the brats are all *screaming*, and there's adrenaline rushing through his veins like lightning. So, he picks up his weapon, nods to Harrington, and tells him to *plant his fucking feet* because this *it* . Times up. It's probably the end of the road for them, but he's not going to go down without a fight and like hell he's leaving Harrington in this shit hole to die alone.

There's only two seconds of heart pounding anxiety before the hoard is upon them and Billy is poised to start swinging, but instead of rows of sharp teeth, ripping flesh, and warm blood spraying everything, there's just a whoosh of air as the monsters rush past them like they don't even exist.

Weird.

One knocks into him in its hurry and he nearly stumbles back, but Harrington grabs his arm, keeping him from falling.

"Should have planted your feet," He quips, voice tinged with a mixture of amusement and relief.

"Yeah, yeah. Go fuck yourself." He replies, yanking his arm out of his grasp. "Not that I'm not *grateful* to be in one piece, but where are they going?"

That's when the Wheeler kid loses his Goddamn mind.

"Eleven!" He screams and tries jumping back down into the hole. The other kids grab him as Harrington shimmies up the rope and nearly tackles him to the ground.

Billy climbs out just in time to see him shaking the kids shoulders. "Stop! We're done, Mike! You're *not* going back in there."

"I have to! You don't understand! She needs help!"

"She *has* help!" Says Henderson.

"We already distracted them. We gave her more time!" Sinclair insists

Then Harrington yells, "Stop fighting me!" as Wheeler takes a swing, and this would be really hilarious in any other situation, but right now it's just sad.

"No! I have to go!"

Before anyone else can respond, something weird happens with the headlights, because of course it fucking does, that stops them in their tracks, They glow brighter than Billy has ever seen and they all put their hands in front of their eyes, shielding them from the light. It feels as if the bulbs are about to burst, but that was impossible. That doesn't happen.

"What the-" As sudden as the blinding light appeared, it's gone, the headlights fading back into their normal level of intensity.

"Well," He says after a beat. "That was fun."

Max rolls her eyes and everyone starts talking again. Billy rubs his temples and sighs loudly. Was it like this *all* the time? Loud and obnoxious and entirely too much sass thrown around? If it was, he felt a bit sorry for Harrington. He'd have shoved them all in a closet or something a long ass time ago. Damn.

Said man is now yelling over the group and demanding that they get the hell in the car before anything else happens. He is *all* for that and drops into the driver's seat, pulling off the handkerchief and fishing for a cigarette, because after *that* twenty minutes of bullshit, he fucking *needs* one.

Unlike the ride there, this time Harrington sits in the passenger side with all the brats packed together in the back. He's huffing and running his hands carefully through his hair, muttering something

about Nancy Wheeler murdering him.

It may be because the adrenaline is finally waning, but Billy wants to laugh at that notion. After all the shit that went down tonight, the only one with any chance of being murdered before sunrise is *him*.

The mood is rather somber as they pull up to the house. He guesses it's because they are worried about their friends, but *he's* quiet because he's still trying to figure out if maybe Max actually had used the tranq on him and that this was all in his head. He doesn't know which scenario would be worse.

Another set of headlights pulls up next to them and the kids tumble out of the car. They are suddenly smiling and helping some lady, the owner of this car he assumes, with a different kid drenched in sweat. Just how many kids does his sister hang out with?

Nancy Wheeler and the freak Byers get out of the front and they are talking to her brother, leaning on each other and… *huh*… they are looking rather *chummy* . He glances over to Harrington and sees that his eyes are also trained on them and his hands are shaking. He looks like he wants to be anywhere but there.

"Hey, Princess, isn't Wheeler supposed to be with *you*?" Billy asks, because he's a fucking *asshole* , alright?

A humorless laugh fills the car as he shrugs his shoulders. "Yeah, before today I thought so, but our whole relationship was apparently *bullshit* and so am I."

Ok, that makes zero fucking sense, and he's about to say just that when Byers opens his door and tries to drag him out by his shirt. Billy let's him. He just has no fight left in him at this point.

"What the *hell* are *you* doing here?" He spits.

It's a fair question but he says, "Hey now, Byers, watch the merchandise," instead of answering.

"Wait!" Harrington runs around the car, trying to diffuse the situation. "Stop! Hold on, Jonathan. I can explain. "

Nancy gasps when she sees him, " *Steve* , what happened to your *face* ? "

Billy grins and raises a hand, " *I can explain."*

Harrington shoots him a withering look before turning back to them. "Let's just take it inside, alright? He *knows* . He knows about the demodogs and the upside down."

"What? "

"*Seriously?!"*

"Like I said, he knows. We can explain everything when Hopper gets here," He pauses, "*If* Hopper gets here."

Hopper*? Oh shit.* That's *right* . They'd mentioned that the chief of fucking *police* is in on this sideshow circus. He wasn't a fan of Billy to begin with, so he's sure he'll have *a lot* to say about the state of Harrington's face.

Fuck.

This really wasn't his night.